



City of Greensboro Neighborhood Conservation Overlays Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a neighborhood conservation overlay district?

A Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District is a zoning layer placed on top of the base zoning district that serves to protect unique features of a residential neighborhood. The zoning overlay is tailor-made to each neighborhood and reflects the special qualities of that place. It protects elements visible from the public right-of-way and may vary from setbacks and building massing to distinct architectural features to special natural or environmental characteristics. An NCO also serves to facilitate compatible development or redevelopment.

What changes will happen when a neighborhood becomes a conservation district?

The purpose of an NCO is to protect the existing setting and features of a neighborhood, so a property owner will not have to change or alter the property due to the designation. If the owner does want to alter the property and the proposed changes are addressed in the neighborhood design guidelines, plans will be reviewed by City staff to ensure that any alterations are compatible with the existing neighborhood guidelines.

Who will decide how the guidelines will affect my property?

It is the neighborhood's and stakeholders' decision as to what is regulated and what is not within the overlay district. The neighborhood creates its own design guidelines and conservation plan with the help of City staff. The City serves to help property owners comply with the neighborhood's goals.

How will a conservation district help a neighborhood?

One of the goals of a Conservation Overlay District is to stabilize and enhance neighborhood character and setting by providing a clear plan and set of design guidelines that accurately reflects the neighborhood as a cohesive unit. In doing so, by establishing a higher standard of development, NCOs typically stabilize property values and encourage quality new development and reinvestment in the area. Increased neighborhood pride, resident involvement, and a greater sense of community often result from this recognition as a unique and special place.

How are neighborhood boundaries defined?

Boundaries should reflect a cohesive built environment that represents common characteristics and setting of the neighborhood.

How do you start an NCO in your neighborhood?

Typically a neighborhood files an application with the Planning Department and then an assessment is made as to its eligibility. If the neighborhood is found to be eligible using criteria outlined in the Development Ordinance, a public meeting is scheduled by the Planning Department to provide pertinent information for residents and stakeholders. When a majority of property owners formally support the designation,

the neighborhood drafts a Neighborhood Conservation Plan and Design Guidelines with the assistance of City staff. The plan and guidelines are then reviewed at a public hearing by the Planning Board, Zoning Commission and City Council. Once the Neighborhood Conservation Plan and Design Guidelines have been approved, the Guidelines will be used to review proposed developments within the district.

How do I know if my neighborhood is eligible?

In most instances, neighborhoods will file a preliminary study application that assesses the distinctive features that create a cohesive identifiable setting, character or association. A potential NCO must also contain at least one block face and at least 75% of the land area must have been developed at least 25 years prior to the application.

Is there a fee to become an NCO?

Yes. Since an NCO is an overlay to existing zoning, neighborhoods will be responsible for the standard fees associated with zoning amendments.

How are the guidelines and plan written?

Neighborhoods will be photographed, visited and surveyed by City staff in conjunction with neighborhood residents and stakeholders. The neighborhood and staff will assess the special characteristics of the neighborhood in order to create a plan and guidelines that accurately reflect the goals and characteristics of the neighborhood.

Can a neighborhood be both a Conservation District and an Historic District?

No. Conservation Overlay Districts and Historic Districts serve different purposes. If a neighborhood is unsure of which direction to take, City staff will be happy to review the neighborhood and make suggestions.

Will being an NCO make me change the appearance of my property or rehabilitate it right now?

No. Property owners are not required to alter their properties upon designation. If, however, an owner wishes to alter property after designation, the owner would be required to follow any applicable NCO guidelines.

Will the guidelines be able to regulate paint color?

No. Painting is considered ordinary repair and maintenance and is not regulated.

Is demolition regulated?

No.

Is there a design committee review for alterations or for new construction?

No. All review is done by staff and the general public is not involved in the review process.

How long will review take and will there be a fee?

There is no fee for plan review and design assistance for proposed alterations in addition to the normal fees associated with building permits. Major alterations and new construction follow the same timeline as any project requiring a building permit.

Can an NCO be used to exclude certain types of housing?

No. An NCO is used to maintain the character, setting and identity of a neighborhood and to promote quality, respectful investment. If a parcel is currently zoned for multi-family, an NCO will not change that current land use.

Will an NCO downzone my property?

No, the existing base zoning will remain unchanged. Any vacant parcels will also maintain the range of uses permitted by the underlying zoning. However, the NCO may affect the dimensional standards (lot area, setbacks, building height, etc.), but not the use or density of the base zoning.

Will different land uses have different guidelines?

Commercial and multi-family areas often have different characteristics and settings from their residential neighbors even when they are located within the same neighborhood. In order to conserve these special characteristics, neighborhoods may have different guidelines in order to protect the special qualities of each area.

Any inquiries may be directed to the City of Greensboro Planning Department:

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